

Source Research and Historiographical Contributions to Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's Historical Account

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*Secunda mors ista Homero est, secundus Platoni obitus.*¹ – This is what Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–1464) writes about the fall of Constantinople in one of his letters. Somewhere else he summarizes the events like this: *Fuerunt Italicorum domini, nunc Turchorum inchoatur imperium.*² Today it is difficult to imagine the shock that Western Europe experienced learning about the loss of Constantinople. However, this epochal event (surely considered so by the contemporaries)³ exercised a major effect on the life, writings and political activity of Piccolomini, elected pope by the name of Pius II (1458). As a clergyman, he devoted his entire life to saving Europe from the threat of the Turks and reconquering Constantinople from them by joining the forces of the Christian world. For this purpose he frequently set his pen to paper and wrote down his ideas in letters, speeches or historical accounts.

His efforts in the later genre resulted in his account describing the fall of Constantinople that was first published as the seventh chapter of *De Europa*,

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¹ This sentence is included in Piccolomini's letter to Pope Nicholas V. I refer to the text of the letter following the page and line numbering of Pertusi's edition: A. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli. Vol. II.: L'eco nel mondo*, Verona 1976, 46 (33–34).

² In his letter to Leonardo Benvoglianti: Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 64 (72–73).

³ Cf. S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453*, Cambridge 2015 (Reprint), xi–xiii.

followed by its repeated issue as *separatum*.⁴ The present paper deals with the analysis of this account less known by historians.⁵ Its first part maps out the author's most important sources, while the second half examines his methods as a historiographer.

I.

Worstbrock's report from 1989 illustrates the state of source research on *De Europa* (and *De Asia*): "Eine zureichende Quellenanalyse der 'Asia' und der 'Europa' fehlt."⁶ The situation has not improved much over the past decades as Johannes Helmraht's following remark shows: "Die gegenseitige Kenntnis und Benutzung durch die humanistischen Verfasser dieser Texte, so auch durch Enea Silvio, ist in einigen Fällen evident, in anderen wahrscheinlich. Genauere philologische Untersuchung des ganzen Breitenspektrums ist zu wünschen."⁷ In the followings, I would like to contribute to this analysis by adding some further considerations.

Leonard of Chios

According to Marios Philippides, before starting the account about the siege of Constantinople, Piccolomini completed a thorough research,⁸ and relied mainly on the account of Leonard of Chios. Leonard joined Isidore of Kiev, the pope's delegate on his way to Constantinople in 1452 on the isle of Chios.⁹ He

⁴ Regarding the editions, see: A. Desguine, *L'incunable De captione urbis Constantinopolitanae d'Aeneas Sylvius*, Paris 1965, 7–8.

⁵ Cf. M. Philippides, *Mehmed II the Conqueror and the Fall of the Franco-Byzantine Levant to the Ottoman Turks: Some Western Views and Testimonies*, (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 302), Tempe, AZ 2007, 17.

⁶ F. J. Worstbrock, s.v. Piccolomini, Aeneas Silvius (Papst Pius II.), in K. Ruh et al. Hrsgg., *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters Verfasserlexikon*, 7, Berlin-New York 1989, 659.

⁷ J. Helmraht, "Pius II. und die Türken," in B. Guthmüller-W. Kühlmann, Hrsgg., *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance*, Tübingen 2000, 103.

⁸ Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 17. Philippides also published the text with a critical apparatus, historical commentary and English translation. A review about the volume: Z. Shalev, [M. Philippides, *Mehmed II the Conqueror and the Fall of the Franco-Byzantine Levant to the Ottoman Turks: Some Western Views and Testimonies*. Tempe, AZ 2007] *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009), 968–970. Philippides's edition of Piccolomini's text, in my opinion, is rather problematic in philological terms (that will not be discussed in the present paper). The standard edition of the text: A. v. Heck, ed., *Enee Silvii Piccolominei postea Pii PP. II De Europa*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana 2001, 78–82.

⁹ For more details on Leonard's life, see: A. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli. Vol. I.: Le testimonianze dei contemporanei*, Verona 1976, 120–121; M. Philippides – W. K. Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Historiography, Topography and Military Studies*, Farnham – Burlington 2011, 14–17.

experienced the siege,¹⁰ was held captive, then, after his release he returned to Chios,¹¹ where on 16 August 1453 he wrote a letter to Pope Nicholas V. Reflecting high literary standards, the letter narrating the siege was one of the first reports about the fall of the City that reached Europe. The relatively great number of existing manuscripts prove how popular the vivid account soon became.¹² Piccolomini was probably also familiar with the famous letter. Anton Déthier was the first to imply that Piccolomini's description relies heavily on Leonard's work. However, Déthier fails to offer any proof.¹³ It was Philippides to fill in this gap who pointed out two parallel loci. The first parallel was discovered in the brief account about the fate of Genovese Giovanni Giustiniani, the city's chief defender.¹⁴ Leonard's version puts it as follows:¹⁵

Reserata porta fugit capitaneus [s.c. Joannes Justinianus] Peram,¹⁶ qui postea Chium navigans, ex vulnere vel tristitia inglorium transitum fecit. (PG 941 col., B)

Piccolomini's paraphrase keeps the briefness of Leonard's text:

Iustinianus in Peram cum divertisset, inde Chium navigavit ibique seu vulnere seu mestitia morbum incidens inglorius vitam finivit, . . .¹⁷ (De Europa 2091–2093)

The second clue indicating adaptation follows a few lines later. Leonard names two defenders, the Greek Theophilus Palaeologus and the Dalmatian John Sclavus, who fought back the inpouring Turks heroically:

Inter haec Theophilus Palaeologus, vir catholicus: Jam perditā urbe, me, inquit, vivere non licet; Teucrorumque pondus aliquandiu sustinens, et decertans, securi discinditur. Ita Johannes Sclavus Illyricus, veluti Hercules se opponens, multos prius mactat, deinde gladio finivit vitam¹⁸ hostili. (PG 941 col., B)

¹⁰ About this, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 15.

¹¹ We do not have any specific information on the circumstances of his release; cf. Philippides–Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 16–17.

¹² On manuscript tradition, see: Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 121; Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 18–19. On Leonard's Greek reception, see: M. Philippides, "The Fall of Constantinople: Bishop Leonard and the Greek Accounts," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 22 (1981) 287–300.

¹³ Cf. Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 105, n. 51. Déthier's work was unavailable to me.

¹⁴ M. Philippides, "Urbs Capta. Early 'Sources' on the Fall of Constantinople (1453)," in T. S. Miller – J. Nesbitt, eds., *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S. J.*, Washington, D. C. 1995. 209–224; esp. 221–223.

¹⁵ I cite Leonard's letter based on *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) vol. 159, coll. 923–944; I also refer to the text of Pertusi's edition wherever the two editions are significantly different. In the following, I will cite the text of Piccolomini's historical account based on v. Heck, *Enee Silvii Piccolomini De Europa*, following its line numbering.

¹⁶ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 162 (449–451): *Refugit capitaneus in Peram; qui post Chium navigans ex vulnere vel tristitia inglorium transitum fecit.*

¹⁷ Following the above-cited sentence, Piccolomini adds another ironic remark about Giustiniani's death: . . . *felix, si in ipsis Bizantii menibus animam exalasset. (De Europa 2093–2094)*

¹⁸ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 164 (459): *vitam finivit.*

After describing the emperor's inglorious death, Piccolomini also mentions the two men who, according to him, prove to be the only heroes:

In tanta multitudo pugnatorum duo tantum reperti sunt, qui se viros ostenderit: alter Graecus, alter Dalmata, Theophilus Paleologus et Ioannes Sclavus. Qui fugere turpe putantes, cum diu Turcorum impetum sustinuisset multosque obtruncassent, denique non tam victi quam vincendo fatigati inter cadavera hostium occubuerunt. (De Europa 2087–2091)

The accounts of *eye witnesses* of the fall do not mention the two men. Therefore, Piccolomini certainly borrowed the story of the two heroic defenders from Leonard, which he then rephrased and adjusted to his own account.¹⁹ The examples cited by Philippides are convincing and their number may be increased based on similar grounds. The following six examples serve to improve this latter statement.

1. The time of the final attack was announced by heralds in the Turkish camp. The order prescribed a fast to be held before the attack and also allowed a three day long free predation in the city. Following the order, the soldiers held a fast on the day preceding the attack, then, after nightfall, they organized feasts and receptions to say goodbye to one another. Piccolomini describes this as follows:

Ad extremum voce preconis totis castris inclamatum est quinto Kal. Maii milites omnes ieiunium sanctificent; sequenti die in armis assint urbem extremis viribus oppugnaturi; triduo civitatem militum direptioni futuram. Constituta die ieiunium ad noctem usque servatum. Exin lucentibus stellis invitationes ac convivium passim habita; ut quisque amicum, propinquum notumque habuit, cum eo hilaris epulatus est, atque ubi satis adbibitum, tamquam se deinceps numquam visuri essent, amplexati exosculantur simul ultimum vale dixerunt. (De Europa 2029–2037)

A similar description only occurs in Leonard's work:

Ergo proclamatum est in castris edicto, ut quarto Kalendis Maii,²⁰ die videlicet Martis, praevis diebus tribus, quibus luminaria Deo accendant, Deum invocent, integra die abstineant, parati sint omnes ad praelium: daturi Christianis generale certamen; altissimaque voce praeconis voluntate regis urbem triduo ad saccum esse bellatoribus donatam. [...] Sicque factum est: triduo luminaria Deo accendant, jejulant die nihil usque ad noctem gustantes: invicem congaudentes, invicem convivantes, se ipsos quasi ad inferos die certaminis abituri, osculis resalutant. (PG 938 col., A–C)

2. After describing the mainly sacral events that took place in the Turkish camp, Piccolomini, counterpointing the account about the camp, directs his attention to what lies behind the walls of Constantinople and describes the procession of its citizens:

In urbe autem sacerdotes sacras ferentes imagines sequente populo urbem lustrare, auxilium de celo petere, affligere corpora; ieiuniis atque orationibus universi cives intendere. (De Europa 2038–2040)

¹⁹ Philippides, "Urbs Capta," 223 phrases it precisely: "Yet, it is apparent from the phraseology involved that Aeneas Sylvius elaborated this information further; he kept the factual names and gave the circumstances his own coloring."

²⁰ Cf. Piccolomini: *quinto Kal. Maii*.

Here, data is probably taken from Leonard's description again, although he offers a more detailed and understandably more personal account than Piccolomini:

Nos tantam religionem admirati, Deum propitiatorem profusis lacrymis precabamur, sacras imagines, processionaliter, compuncti, per vallum urbemque transferentes, nudis pedibus mulierum virorumque turbis consequentibus deprecabamur, cum poenitudine cordis ne haereditatem suam Dominus demoliri permetteret, et quod dignaretur fidelibus suis in tanto certamine porrigere dextram, qui solus Deus, et non alius pro Christianis pugnare potens est. Itaque nostram spem totam in Deo ponentes, constitutum certaminis diem confortati vigorosius expectabamus: . . . (PG 938 col., C–D)

Beyond the similarities in content, the fact that the account about the camp and the description of the procession are adjacent and constitute a strong unit also confirms the borrowing.

3. Piccolomini's writing includes several remarks about the tactics of the fighting parties. One of these brief notes reveals that the Byzantine defensive works were in rather bad condition, therefore, they trusted mostly the advanced works (the outer wall and ditch before the headwall):²¹

Erant muri urbis et altitudine et crassitudine toto orbe celebres, sed ob vetustatem et Grecorum incuriam pinnis ac propugnaculis nudi; antemuralia vero opportune communita. In his Graeci salutem posuere. (De Europa 2041–2044)

While criticising the Greeks' tactics,²² Leonard also mentions the faith put in the advanced works:

. . . quam postea sero si reparare voluerunt, duo defuerunt, aes et tempus; quae poterant, si guerram intendebant, opportunius et importunius extorquere. Sed innata non sinebat procrastinationis ineptia. Omnem ergo spem in fossatis et antemurali posuerunt: . . . (PG 936 col., D)

Besides Leonard, as far as I know, no other author discusses the role of advanced works and the faith put in them. Therefore, Piccolomini probably drew from Leonard's letter here as well, and followed it in mentioning the bad state of the walls and the negligence of Greeks.

4. Piccolomini depicts the events after the city's seizure with vivid colours. In his account, he devotes special attention to the desecration of the Christian symbols.

Simulachrum Crucifixi, quem colimus et verum Deum esse fatemur, tubis ac tympanis preeuntibus raptum ex urbe hostes ad tentoria deferunt, sputo lutoque fedant et ad nostre religionis irrisionem iterum cruci affigunt. Exin pileo, quem sarculam vocant, capiti eius imposito corona undique facta "Hic est" iniquiunt "christianorum

²¹ Cf. Runciman, 1453, 91–92; Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 491ff.

²² *Operosa autem protegendi vallum et antemurale nostris fuit cura; quod contra animum meum semper fuit, qui suadebam, in refugium muros altos primos non deserendos: qui si ob imbres negligentiamque vel scissi, vel inermes propugnaculis essent, a principio dum propositum guerrae intervenit, reparari potuissent, reparandi custodiendique erant: qui non deserti, praesidium urbi salutis contulissent. (PG 936 col., B)*

Deus". Tum lapides, lutumque iactantes miris dehonestant modis. (De Europa 2124–2129)

Yet again, the source of the description is to be found in Leonard's account, since among the narrators of the *Halōsis* he is the only one to mention the cross desecrated with *zarchula*:

Sacras Dei et sanctorum effigies humo prosternunt: quibus super non modo crapulam, sed luxuriam complent. Crucifixum posthac per castra praevis tympanis deludendo deportant: sputis, blasphemis, opprobriis iterum processionaliter crucifigunt: pileum Teucrale, quod Zarchula vocant, capiti superponentes, deridendo. Hic est Deus Christianorum. (PG 942 col., C)

5. The description of the Turkish soldiers' horrible deeds is followed by the records of their leaders' barbarian acts:

Post hec convivatus Maomethes, cum forte plus solito adbibisset, ut sanguinem mero adderet, . . . (De Europa 2136–2137)

However, the "original portrait" of the sultan pouring his enemies' blood in his wine was not drawn by Piccolomini but Leonard:

Parta autem victoria, Turci Bacchanalia festosque dies celebrant: quibus rex, forte temulentior factus, sanguinem Baccho misceri voluit humanum. (PG 942 col., C)

6. Mehmed satisfied his blood thirst with the blood of captivated noblemen, those executed also included Loukas Notaras *megadux*:

Karilucas, qui apud imperatorem plurimum poterat, ceso ante oculos maiori filio, altero ad illicitos usus reservato, securi percussus est; duo alii eius filii in bello ceciderant. (De Europa 2138–2141)

Various sources mention Notaras's execution.²³ Piccolomini's description, however, is closest to Leonard's account:²⁴

At Chirluca malitia poenam non evasit: qui protinus perditis, primum in bello duobus liberis maioribus, alio impubere luxui regali reservato, coramque oculis tertio filio caeso, cum caeteris baronibus decollatur. (PG 943 col., A)

Other than Leonard's letter, no further source is known to have described that the sultan kept one of the *megadux*'s sons alive only for the purpose of subsequent fornication. Besides similarity in content, similar structure also confirms borrowing: in Leonard's letter the above mentioned three episodes (4, 5 and 6) are adjacent, just as in Piccolomini's description. Based on the examples cited above, the results of our research may be summarized as follows: (1) Piccolomini's account includes various data that only occur in Leonard's letter; (2) these data follow one another in the same order in the two writings and are edited similarly (cf. examples 1 and 2, as well as examples 4, 5 and 6);

²³ See the collected sources here: Philippides-Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 597ff.

²⁴ Although it is highly unlikely, the possibility that Piccolomini also knew Isidore's account (or used it here) cannot be excluded: *Post tres dies decrevit ac iussit primo quidem duobus filiis Notarae – alter enim gloriose dimicans interierat – capita in conspectu patris amputari, ipsi deinde patri, postea magni domestici filios tres pulcherrimos et optimos occidit et insuper patrem eorum. Cf. Philippides-Hanak, The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 600.

(3) based on the two considerations above, it is highly probable that Piccolomini used Leonard's letter; (4) the parallel loci show that Piccolomini adapted the text of the letter to his own work after revising²⁵ and rephrasing it thoroughly.

Nikolaos Sekoundinos

Philippides mentions another possible source besides Leonard: "It is not unreasonable to suppose that Aeneas Sylvius discussed the siege and fall of Constantinople in 1453 with Sekoundinos. [. . .] While Aeneas Sylvius undoubtedly used other accounts, such as Bishop Leonardo's famous epistula, there is nothing to prevent us from assuming that he had received some facts from Sekoundinos also."²⁶

Nikolaos Sekoundinos was an outstanding Greek humanist of the *Quattrocento* who, thanks to his erudition and excellent command of languages, had a successful career serving the Vatican and the Republic of Venice.²⁷ He received his first important assignment – that later served him as a stepping-stone – probably with the assistance of Cardinal Bessarion at the Council of Florence, where, after the resignation of Francesco Filelfo, he participated as a translator of Greek and Latin. His considerable knowledge of languages not only at-

²⁵ For example, it may be interesting to note that Piccolomini consistently uses the word *Turci* to indicate Turks instead of *Teucri*, the word mostly used by Leonard. Piccolomini belonged to the humanists who strived to deny the view according to which the Turks were the descendants of Trojans. To learn more about this debate and Piccolomini's position, see: J. Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995) 111–207; esp. 135–144; Helmrath, "Pius II. und die Türken," 106–111. It is probably due to correction that in the camp scene (cf. 1.) Piccolomini wrote *quinto Kal. Maii*.

²⁶ Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 17; cf. Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 104–105. The wording suggests that Piccolomini must have received mainly verbal information from Sekoundinos. Franz Babinger shares the same opinion: "Niccolò Sagundino che, appena ritornato dalla Turchia, si era presentato a Pio II. È a lui che dobbiamo la più vecchia relazione ancora conservata sulle condizioni e sugli avvenimenti della Costantinopoli recentemente conquistata. I suoi rapporti con Pio II sono chiariti in tutti i dettagli, per cui non è dubitabile che grazie a lui il papa poté acquistare una profonda conoscenza della situazione turca." F. Babinger, "Pio II e l'Oriente maomettano," in D. Maffei, ed., *Enea Silvio Piccolomini papa Pio II. Atti del convegno per il quinto centenario della morte e altri scritti raccolti da Domenico Maffei*, Siena 1968, 3.

²⁷ On Sekundinos's life and career, see: F. Babinger, "Nikolaos Sagoundinos, ein griechisch-venedischer Humanist des 15. Jhdts," in *Χαριστήριον εἰς Ἀναστάσιον κ. Ὀρλάνδον*, Tom. I., Ἀθήναι 1965, 198–212; P. D. Mastrodemetres, *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ (1402–1464) ΒΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΡΓΟΝ*, Ἀθήναι 1970. 19–100; P. D. Mastrodemetres, "Nicolaos Secundinos a Napoli dopo la caduta di Costantinopoli," *ΙΤΑΛΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ*, *Rivista di cultura greco-moderna* 2 (1989) 21–38. To find abundant further data on the literature, see: Mastrodemetres, "Nicolaos Secundinos a Napoli," 21, n. 1.

tracted the participants' attention,²⁸ but his reputation also reached those absent, like Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini,²⁹ who writes the following about the Greek translator: *Post multas disputationes in quibus tanquam interpres Nicolaus Sagundinus, utraque lingua disertissimus ingenio facundiae iuxta promptus illustre nomen adeptus est.*³⁰ Two decades later their paths crossed. In April 1456, both of them stayed in Naples as guests in the court of Alfonso V of Aragon (I as Neapolitan king).

This was not the first time Sekoundinos visited the South Italian city. In 1453, he received an assignment from the *Serenissima* to accompany Bartolomeo Marcello to Constantinople and assist the Republic's negotiations with Mehmed II, the new lord of the city.³¹ On 5 July 1453, Sekoundinos joined the deputation in Chalcis (Negropont) and spent almost two months in Constantinople, occupied and desolated a few weeks earlier. In September he returned to Venice following Marcello's command to inform the *Serenissima* about the negotiations. Upon returning to the Venetian Lagoon, Sekoundinos was one of those who could give a personal account about Constantinople taken over by the Turks and the young sultan as its conqueror. No wonder that soon after his arrival he received invitations to both the papal and the Neapolitan court to share his experience. At the end of the year he accepted these invitations and left Venice to travel to Rome first, then in early January 1454 to Naples. Sekoundinos felt obliged to warn Pope Nicholas V and Alfonso V about the Ottoman threat that, after the occupation of Constantinople, might have meant a direct danger to Italy as several contemporary thinkers suggested.³² We obviously do not know the words Sekoundinos actually said to the pope and the king of Naples. However, on 25 January 1454 Alfonso V ordered the publication of the work entitled *Oratio disertissimi viri Nicolai Sagudini ad Serenissimum Alfonsum Regem Aragonum* that enables us to draw a picture about the Greek guest's experiences in Constantinople. Sekoundinos has a long account about the conquering sultan. This description was the first one about Mehmed II based on personal experience and it became widespread in the Western world. Many manuscripts preserved Sekoundinos's portrait³³ that had a substantial influence on the contemporary portrayals of Mehmed³⁴ – just like that of Picco-

²⁸ Cf. Babinger, "Nikolaos Sagoundinos, ein griechisch-venedischer Humanist," 200–201.

²⁹ Piccolomini did not participate in the council; he stayed in Basle at the time. To learn more about this period, see: G. Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini. L'umanesimo sul soglio di Pietro*, Ravenna 1978, 56ff.

³⁰ The text is cited by Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 8, n. 7.

³¹ In the course of the following account of events I relied mainly on these works: Babinger, "Nikolaos Sagoundinos, ein griechisch-venedischer Humanist," 198–212; Mastrodemetres, "Nikolaos Secundinos a Napoli," 21–38.

³² Cf. Babinger, "Nikolaos Sagoundinos, ein griechisch-venedischer Humanist," 204.

³³ About the manuscripts, see: Mastrodemetres, *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ*, 124–128.

³⁴ About the influence of Sekoundinos's portrait of Mehmed, see: Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 11–14.

lomini.³⁵ In 1454 Sekoundinos returned to Venice,³⁶ then in September 1455 he travelled to Naples again, where he stayed until July 1456. He wrote his only historical work entitled *De Otthomanorum Familia* (hereinafter referred to as *OF*) here.³⁷ However, it was not the Aragonese ruler who encouraged him to write this work but Piccolomini, who arrived in the city as an ambassador.

Piccolomini was driven to Naples by his patriotism, because Jacopo Piccinino, the known *condottiere* and his horse-troopers invaded the Sienese Republic early that year. And although defenders managed to press back the intruders and close them round in Orbitello, the encircling did not guarantee the safety of the Republic, since Piccinino was backed up by Alfonso V of Aragon, who used the *condottiere* to get back at the Republic of Siena for making peace with the Milanese prince and the Florentines without asking him despite their alliance and gun friendship. Based on the request of the Republic's principals, Piccolomini travelled to the court of the Aragonese ruler to persuade the king to make peace and pull the rug from under Piccinino (what he did accomplish).³⁸

Piccolomini probably met the Byzantine Sekoundinos in the intervals of negotiations. The two men must have found a common voice quickly since they had a lot in common: they might have been about the same age,³⁹ both were enthusiasts of humanistic erudition and fierce advocates of the pressing need for joining forces against the Turks and starting a crusade. Both were aware that a token of the successful fight against the Turks may be finding out more about the enemy and passing on that information to the public. Piccolomini might have had this in mind when he asked the Greek humanist to compile a brief history of the Turks. He could not have found anybody more capable of completing this task than Sekoundinos: his erudition was impeccable, he had an excellent command of Latin, being Greek, he was personally affected by the conquest, and what is more, he had an autopsy of the Turk sultan and the fallen Byzantine capital. Sekoundinos earned his trust and soon completed his discourse that was preserved in nine manuscripts.⁴⁰ Two manuscripts also include the dedication to Piccolomini.⁴¹ It amounting to a *laudatio* reveals that it

³⁵ Cf. Helmuth, "Pius II. und die Türken," 102, 114.

³⁶ The exact date is unknown; cf. Mastrodemetres, "Nicolaos Secundinos a Napoli," 26.

³⁷ The half sentence – *paucis tamen ne historiam contexere videar* – expressing the dedication to Piccolomini implies that even Sekoundinos himself did not consider his writing a historical work. Researchers, however, do regard it that way, see, for example: Mastrodemetres, *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ*, 168ff.

³⁸ Cf. *Comm.* 1, 31–32.

³⁹ Piccolomini was born in 1405. Sekoundinos was probably born sometime between 1402 and 1405; cf. Mastrodemetres, *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ*, 28.

⁴⁰ About the manuscripts, see: Mastrodemetres, *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ*, 168ff.

⁴¹ Marc. lat. 13. n. 62 (4418), f. 1^r–1^v; Vat. Ottob. lat. 1732a, f. 24^r and 1732b f. 63. The text was published by Mastrodemetres (in *ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΣΕΚΟΥΝΔΙΝΟΣ*, 173–174) who indicates text variations in footnotes.

was basically Piccolomini's request to define the structure of the work.⁴² In the first two chapters, Sekoundinos writes about early Ottoman history, the origin, and the lifestyle of the Turks, then in chapter 3 the catalogue of sultans begins with Osman's coming into power and ends with the rule of Mehmed II and the conquest of Constantinople. This *historia syntomos* proved to be an excellent pre-study for Piccolomini, who was eager to devote his attention to Turks not only in his orations but also in his historical works. Piccolomini's account also owes a lot to Sekoundinos's writing, and we can establish this not as a mere assumption – we can go further than Philippides by stating it as a fact.⁴³ The following two excerpts confirm that our enterprise is not groundless. The first one is Sekoundinos's description while the second is Piccolomini's account:

*Mahumetus subinde filius, qui in praesentia rerum potitur gubernacula imperii ex voto adeptus, instituta totius regni pro ingenio correxit. Leges ipse suas domi forisque attulit, aerarium locupletavit, nova vectigalia excogitavit, copias auxit. In procures et aulicos saevire contumeliarique coepit, expeditionem adversus Constantinopolim diu animo volvens castellum iuxta litus ad ostium Bosphori paulo ab urbe remotius, aliud simulans, incredibili celeritate extruxit atque munivit. Bellum inde urbi non indixit, sed contra inita foedera, contra iusiurandum, simul atque intulit et gerere coepit. Innumeris demum p<a>ene coactis undique copiis, mirabili apparatu, formidoloso animi impetu, terra marique aggressus eam cuniculis, ac latentibus fossis altissime actis, aggere late edito, ponte (quia mare, versus Peram oppidum, muros alluit urbis) longitudine ad duo milia passuum raptim exstructo, turribus ligneis eo usque erectis, ut muros urbis, qui altissimi erant, excederent. Machinarum tormentorumque multiplici adhibito genere, post quartum et quinquagesimum diem summa vi et extrema pugna cepit, imperatore ipso ingressu hostium confosso atque extincto.*⁴⁴

Maomethes igitur defuncto Amurate gubernacula regni ex voto adeptus instituta maiorum pro ingenio correxit, leges ipse suas domi forisque tulit, erarium locupletavit, nova vectigalia excogitavit, copias auxit, in procures et aulicos seivire contumeliari ve cepit. [. . .] Cum paucis igitur participato consilio castellum iuxta lictus ad hostium Bosphori paulo ab urbe remotius, aliud dissimulans, incredibili celeritate extruxit ac munivit. Bellum deinde urbi non modo indixit, sed contra inita federa, contra iusiurandum intulit simul et gerere cepit. [. . .] Maomethes interea coactis undique copiis mirabili apparatu, formidando animi impetu terra marique regiam urbem aggressus cuniculis ac latentibus fossis altissime actis, aggere late edito, ponte, qua Peram oppidum versus mare muros alluit, urbis longitudinis ad duo milia passuum raptim exstructo, turribus ligneis eousque erectis, ut muros, quamvis altissimos,

⁴² *Petiisti namque a me ut eorum tibi nomina darem, qui Machumetae, Turcorum regi, a primo domus et familiae auctore maiores fuissent. Ita cuiusque vita et nomine designatis, ut, loco et ordine quis cui successisset, intelligere posses.*

⁴³ Surprisingly, Philippides did not notice that the two texts are closely related, which v. Heck indicates with italics in his edition of *De Europa*; cf. *De Europa* 1997–2000, 2008–2011, 2022–2028, 2137–2138. v. Heck mentions Nikolaos Sekoundinos in his edition as a source, although in the text, he does not identify the source of quotations any more but only italicizes them; cf. v. Heck, *De Europa*, 7.

⁴⁴ I refer to the text based on Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 80, 82.

excederent machinamentorum tormentorumque multiplici adhibito genere. (De Europa 1997–2000, 2008–2011, 2022–2028)

The many verbatim correspondences prove undoubtedly that Piccolomini did not only rely on Sekoundinos's verbal information but also used the *OF* written based on request. This fact enables us to roughly estimate the time of the text's origin. Eric Cochrane – who refers to Piccolomini's work under the title of *De Captione Urbis Constantinopolitanae* – estimates the origin of the work to be 1461.⁴⁵ His book does not contain any information as to why he establishes this date and what exactly he means by the origin of the work: creation or publication. One thing is sure: the date of origin he defines is wrong, whatever it may refer to. The error is probably caused by the fact that Cochrane linked the creation of the work to the publication of *De Asia* (1461), the second major unit of *Cosmographia*. Instead of the time provided by Cochrane, I suggest the following date(s). Based on the common features of the texts by Piccolomini and Sekoundinos, *terminus post quem* can be defined, which is 20 July 1456, the date of *OF*'s origin.⁴⁶ We must regard 1458, that is the publication of *De Europa*, to be the *terminus ante quem* since whether the text was created as an independent discourse or as a chapter of *Cosmographia*, it was published in *De Europa* so it must have been completed by 1458. At least three years had surely passed after the fall of the city when Piccolomini took pen in hand to record the events in a historical account (as well). Throughout these three years, the image reflected by his writings penned down directly after the destruction of Constantinople changed to some extent.

II.

From the summer of 1453 on, the *Halōsis* was a recurring theme in Piccolomini's letters and orations. Although the term *historical* cannot be put before these writings due to the different frameworks of genre, they offer an excellent opportunity for us to gain insight into Piccolomini's activities as a researcher and historiographer, allowing us to follow the process in which the chaotic, uncertain and often times exaggerated news arriving in Western Europe brought by refugees eventually turned into a literary work that deserves the

⁴⁵ E. W. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago 1981, 46.

⁴⁶ 20 July 1456 is the date of publication; cf. Babinger, "Nikolaos Sagoundinos, ein griechisch-venedischer Humanist," 206–207. According to Mastrodemetres, Nikolaos Sekoundinos completed *OF* on 20 April 1456. He does not provide any arguments for the definition of date; cf. Mastrodemetres, "Nicolaos Secundinos a Napoli," 32.

adjective *historical*. In the following, I will examine the letters that originated directly after the fall of the City.⁴⁷

The first letter was created on 12 July 1453, and was addressed to Pope Nicholas V. The letter written with hands shaking⁴⁸ because of the shocking news reveals that Piccolomini learnt about what had happened in Constantinople from people returning from Serbia.⁴⁹ He informs the Pope based on these news that the Byzantine emperor was decapitated while his son was able to escape to Pera (44 [18–20]). In the letter urging joint action against the Turks, he also mentions the course of the siege briefly (44 [11–17]), he refers to the desolation of Hagia Sophia and other temples (46 [27–30]) and, of course, the destruction of books and Greek literature (46 [30–35]). The fact that based on the first news, Piccolomini did not know what exactly had happened in the city is apparent from the brevity of descriptive sections as well as the following half sentence: . . . *at huius tempore urbs regia Constantinopolis a Turchis capta direptaque est, nescio an diruta incensave dici poterit* . . . (48 [55–57])

Probably in possession of the news by then arriving frequently, he could offer cardinal Nicolaus a more detailed description about the siege on 21 July (50 [23]–52 [35]).⁵⁰ This time he mentions the emperor's decapitation again (50 [35–36]),⁵¹ but does not write about the prince escaped to Pera. Instead, he writes a long discussion about the depredation of the city and the barbaric and blasphemous deeds of the Turks (52, [36–48]) and, of course, about how the ancient Greek heritage died together with the city (52 [48–63]). He claims that although he does not have any data about these horrible events, but it is easy to imagine what could have happened.⁵² Piccolomini does not only rely on his imagination: in the letter he also refers to his sources twice: at the beginning of the letter he mentions the reports coming from Serbia,⁵³ while later on he makes a reference to the news arriving from Venice.⁵⁴

The letter that Piccolomini sent cardinal Domenico Capranice from Graz on 27 July proves how contradictory the news coming from Constantinople was in the weeks following the conquest of the city: *De Turchis fuerunt hic nuper hor-*

⁴⁷ I cite the letters following the page and line numbering of Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*; except for the letter addressed to cardinal Capranice that I cite based on A. Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli*, Bologna 1983.

⁴⁸ *Tremet manus, dum haec scribo*, . . . (44 [4]).

⁴⁹ *Qui res gestas ad nos ex Rascia venientes enarrant*, . . . (44 [17–18]).

⁵⁰ This description, for example, includes the date of the third, decisive attack, although wrongly: *pridie ' calendas Iunias* (50 [24]).

⁵¹ In the first letter he only mentions the decapitation (*capite multatum*); but it is not clear whether it is an execution or the mutilation of the corpse. The second letter reveals that the emperor was captivated alive and decapitated later on: *Imperator novae Romae captus, mox capite truncatus asseritur*. (52 [35–36]).

⁵² *Quid autem factura sit Turchorum rabies in urbe regia non scio, suspicari facile est*: . . . (52 [40–41]).

⁵³ *Aiunt enim, qui de Rascia ad nos veniunt*, . . . (50 [23]).

⁵⁴ *Ferunt, qui de Venetiis ad nos veniunt*, . . . (56 [109–110]).

*renda nova ex Rascia atque etiam ex Venetiis missa fuitque vehemens rumor, Constantinopolim perditam, classem Christianorum amissam, Peram Turcho traditam. Id caesari et omni curiae suae molestissimum erat, quemadmodum sanctissimo domino nostro super eo negotio non brevem epistolam scripserim. Nunc feliciora relata sunt aut non tam aspera nova. Dicit enim, praesidium domini nostri intrasse Constantinopolim ac regiam urbem defensam esse, perditas tamen nonnullas naves. Itaque mente quietiori sumus. Caesar⁵⁵ ad inquirendum verum nuntios misit, quos prope dies expectamus . . .*⁵⁶

Piccolomini could not remain calm for long. It soon turned out that the news about Constantinople's liberation was false. The letter to Leonardo Benvoglienti almost two months later (on 25 September) does not have any vain hopes and contains no details about the siege, only considers the consequences of the defeat and tries to find those responsible for the disaster. In the middle of discussing the sinful fraction and ignorance of Europe's Christian states and depicting a threatening vision of the Turks' landing in Italy, Piccolomini makes a brief detour. In the *excursus* he describes the pagan deeds of the Turks devastating Constantinople, and reports a story not included in the former two letters referring to *eye witnesses*. According to this, the sultan raped a young virgin of noble origin and her brother of royal blood at the altar of Hagia Sophia in front of the public, then he ordered their execution.⁵⁷

These letters have various traces of Piccolomini's activities as a researcher and historiographer: on the one hand, they include data and motives that had great importance in his historical account also years later, on the other hand however, these texts also contain writings that did not become part of his historical work for some reason. Both tracks are expressive. Let us proceed on the latter one first.

The accounts about the emperor's decapitation, the prince's escape to Pera and the siblings' rape at the altar of Hagia Sophia disappeared after a while as a result of thorough research and consideration. As suggested by the second letter, Piccolomini soon found out that the story of the prince's escape to Pera is untrue, since Emperor Constantine XI did not have a male offspring. However, when assessing the accounts about the emperor's death he must have had a more difficult task.

The circumstances of the death of Constantine XI are unclear to this day.⁵⁸ The sources mostly agree that after Giustiniani's retreat, the last Byzantine

⁵⁵ Sc. Frederick III (1440–1493).

⁵⁶ Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poco noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli*, 92.

⁵⁷ *Aiunt, qui praesentes fuere, spurcissimum illum Turchorum ducem, sive ut aptius loquar, teterrimam bestiam apud summam aram sanctae Sophiae propalam videntibus omnibus nobilissimam virginem ac fratrem eius adolescentem regalis sanguinis construprasse ac deinde necari iussisse.* (64 [48–53])

⁵⁸ On the death and supposed resting place of Constantine XI, see: Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 364, n. 159; Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 231ff.

emperor lost his life in the final battle at the Gate of St. Romanus.⁵⁹ No information is available as to how exactly the emperor died: it happened without the presence of any of those who later on recorded the events based on their personal experiences. Therefore, any available account can be regarded only as an indirect, secondary source. However, the tradition about the emperor's mutilation occurs in various documents.

Ubertino Pusculo, the poet born in Brescia⁶⁰ arrived in Constantinople not long before the start of the siege with the goal of language learning, he stayed in the city during the battles, then after his captivity, he returned to Italy and composed poems about the events in which he wrote the following about the emperor's death: *Rex ut forte caput galea nudatus inani / Inclinans oculos intra tentoria fessos / Carpebat somnum, / Magno clamore citatus / Exilit, eque fuga cives revocare laborans / Ense petit nudo Teucros, solusque repugnans / Increpitat socios, tres ipsoque aggere truncat / Ianizaros. Tandem media inter tempora grandi / Vibrato cecidit gladio. Caput abstulit unus / Ex humeris.*⁶¹

Benvenuto,⁶² Ancona's consul to Constantinople and the Byzantine emperor's baron (*baro imperatoris*) also knows that the chopped-off head was taken to Mehmed II on a spear: *Item: quod audivit [sc. Benvenutus] ab uno trumpeta quod imperator graecorum fuit interfectus et eius caput super lancea Turcorum domino pr<a>esentatum.*⁶³

A figure of great prestige, Isidore of Kiev⁶⁴ knows even more: according to him, the sultan rejoiced at the sight of the "present", he insolently abused it, then he quickly sent the mutilated body part to Adrianople: *. . . qui iam ab hostibus vulneratus ac trucidatus fuerat eiusque caput Turco postea domino datum est, qui eo viso plurimum exultavit atque illi petulanti ludibrio impropereavit et continuo in Adrianapolim triumphandum misit.*⁶⁵

All three authors were in the middle of fleeing or already in captivity when the janissaries tried to identify the emperor's dead body going through hundreds of corpses.⁶⁶ Therefore, none of them had an autopsy. That is why Philippides assumes that these accounts reflect the gossip originated in the

⁵⁹ Exception: Nestor-Iskander's account; cf. Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 234–235.

⁶⁰ About Pusculo, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 31–32.

⁶¹ The text is cited based on Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 233.

⁶² About Benvenuto, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 31.

⁶³ The text is cited based on Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 234.

⁶⁴ About Isidore, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 26ff.

⁶⁵ The text is cited based on Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 236.

⁶⁶ Cf. Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 236.

Turkish compounds and not the historical reality.⁶⁷ However, this gossip soon infiltrated the public view and found its way into the works of various authors writing in Greek (Doukas), Latin (Nikolaos Sekoundinos) or Turkish (Mehmed Neşri) who had not been present at the siege.

Nevertheless, many survivors of the siege did not know anything about the mutilation although it is fair to assume that they would have included it in their accounts if they had been informed or found the news authentic. Some of them using a minimalist tone, others a dramatic one, these sources only mention that the emperor lost his life fighting the Turks invading the city. For example, Nicolò Barbaro, the Venetian doctor⁶⁸ writes the following in his journal: *“De l'imperador mai non se potè saver novela di fatti soi, ní vivo, ní morto, ma alcuni dixè che el fo visto in nel numero di corpi morti, el qual fo dito, che el se sofegà al intra'che fexe i Turchi a la porta de san Romano. L'imperator pregava che li suoi l'amazzasse et si messe nella furia con la spada, et cascò et rilevò, poi recascò, et così morì.”*⁶⁹

Maybe complete with Marco Barbaro's notes,⁷⁰ Nicolò's recollection shows perfectly that, on the one hand, even the authors who had experienced the siege did not have precise information about the circumstances of the emperor's death, and that, on the other hand, different stories soon started spreading among the survivors about the emperor's end. For instance, both accounts occur and they consist with each other just fine in the description of Jacopo Tetaldi,⁷¹ the Florentine merchant who also witnessed the siege: *“L'imperatore di Costantinopoli fu ucciso. Alcuni dissero che gli fu tagliata la testa, e altri che morì nella mischia presso la porta: ambedue le storie possono essere benissimo vere.”*⁷²

Sphrantzes, the emperor's secretary makes no guesses: he admits that he was not beside Constantine at the fatal moment, therefore, he mentions his lord's death objectively and briefly: *Καὶ τῇ κθ-η μαΐου, ἡμέρα γ-η, ὥρα τῆς ἡμέρας ἀρχῇ, ἀπῆρε τὴν Πόλιν ὁ ἀμνηρᾶς· ἐν ᾗ ὥρα καὶ ἀλώσει τῆς Πόλεως καὶ ὁ μακαρίτης αὐθέντης μου κύρ Κωνσταντῖνος βασιλεὺς ὁ Παλαιολόγος σκοτωθεὶς ἀπέθανεν, ἐμοῦ πλησίον αὐτοῦ οὐχ εὗρεθέντος τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, ἀλλὰ προστάξει ἐκείνου εἰς ἐπίσκεψιν δῆθεν ἄλλου μέρους τῆς Πόλεως· ἰού, ἰού κάμοι, τῆς προνοίας οὐκ οἶδα εἰς τίνα με καιρὸν φυλαττοῦσης.* (*Chronicon Minus* 35, 9)⁷³

⁶⁷ Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 236–237.

⁶⁸ About Barbaro, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 10ff.

⁶⁹ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 35 (847–851; app. ad 851).

⁷⁰ Cf. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 35, app. ad 851.

⁷¹ About Tetaldi, see: Philippides – Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople*, 14.

⁷² Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 184–185. Tetaldi's account survived in another version as well: *“Il cardinale di Russia [= Isidoro di Kiev] morì nella calca; così pure l'imperatore. Alcuni dicono che gli fu tagliata la testa o che anch'egli morì nella calca, volendo ambedue fuggirsene; può essere che l'imperatore sia morto nella calca e che poi i turchi gli abbiano tagliato la testa.”* Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 184–185.

⁷³ The text is cited based on R. Maisano, ed., *Georgii Sphrantzae Chronicon*. (*Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 29), Roma 1990, 134.

Although Leonard, one of Piccolomini's main sources sneaks the emperor's last words into the description for the sake of a more dramatic atmosphere, he does not know about the emperor's mutilation either: *Imperator insuper, ne ab hostibus capiatur: "O quispiam, inquit, valens tyro propter Deum, ne maiestas vaftris viris succumbat mea, gladio me transfigat."* [...] *imperator cadens atque resurgens relabitur et compressione principis patriae e vita demigrat.*⁷⁴

As it is apparent from the diversified and often contradicting stories of the catalogue above (as incomplete as it may be), Piccolomini probably had a difficult job when he reached the description of the emperor's death in composing his historical account. It seems that Piccolomini, who, in his letters had still authenticated the news probably arriving to him through Serbia that reported the emperor's decapitation, did not share Tetaldi's opinion that both stories – that is, both the painful death and the mutilation – might be true, and eventually excluded the latter episode from his historical work. He did so despite the fact that Nikolaos Sekoundinos, one of his main sources also talks about the case. In his famous oration addressed to Alfonso I, the Greek humanist includes a lengthy elocution about the fatal event, showcasing his talent not only in oration but also as a playwright:

*Imperator ubi hostem ruinas iam occupare moenium victoriaque potiri certissima vidit, ne caperetur vivus, sibi ipsi quidem proprias iniicere manus et hoc pacto consciscere mortem, tametsi animus minus deerat, nefas tamen duxit et christiano principe per religionem indignum, suos, qui pauci aderant, hortari coepit, ut se occiderent; sed cum tantum facinus audere voluisset nemo, imperatoriis insignibus depositis et abiectis, ne hostibus notus fieret, privatum <se> gerens stricto ense in aciem irruit fortiterque pugnando, ne inultus abiret, princeps immortalitate dignus hostili manu tandem est interemptus ruinisque urbis ac regni casui regium inmiscuit cadaver. [. . .] Postquam urbs capta et militi in direptionem et praedam data est, rex Turcus imperatorem captum habere cupiens, ubi eum cecidisse percepit, corpus quaeritari curavit; quo in strage civium ruinisque urbis invento atque recognito, caput abscidi iussit, spiculo deinde infixum pompa adhibita circumferri per castra. Legatos post haec, qui caput ipsum XL adiunctis adolescentulis et XX puellis e tota praeda delectis ad Soldanum Aegypti deferrent, declaravit.*⁷⁵

Sekoundinos regards any instrument acceptable for the purpose of "entertaining" his audience and at the same time provoking fear in them. (We can only imagine how Alfonso I must have felt sitting in the audience when the orator traced down the *periēgēsis* of the defeated ruler's amputated head.) The Greek humanist not only wanted to offer his listeners a colourful description about the fall of Constantinople and the conquering sultan, but he strived to wake up the Western potentates from their sleep and prompt them to join forces against the Turks. This was one of the goals of *OF*, his historical work dedicated to Piccolomini. Nonetheless, historiography as a genre is different from rhetoric despite similarities; and this is proven perfectly by the brief half

⁷⁴ The text is cited based on Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli I*, 162 (451–454), 164 (460–462).

⁷⁵ The text is cited based on Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 136 (111–132).

sentence covering the emperor's death in *OF*: . . . *imperatore ipso ingressu hostium confosso atque extincto*.⁷⁶ He no longer mentions suicidal tendencies, the soldiers refusing mercy killing, the discarded armour, the emperor's head carried round in the camp on a spear or the bloody and expressive present sent to the Egyptian sultan in the company of forty boys and twenty girls.

It may not be a coincidence that Piccolomini, familiar with Sekoundinos and the Greek humanist's oration cited above had a rather similar, quasi parallel journey.⁷⁷ It is true that when starting historiography some years later, both authors choose a *somewhat* simpler, clearer account of the emperor's death compared to their former descriptions heated with emotions and full of elocutionary expressions, and they leave behind the shocking and scaring details doubted by many people by then. This parallel development may also be due to the close collaboration of the two humanists.

This hypothesis seems to hold up even when we take a look at the striking differences. Piccolomini's description does not always coincide with the tradition present in *OF* and Leonard's work: *Porta, que Ioanni patuerat, omnibus aperta fugam profusorem reddit. Tunc imperator non, ut regem decuit, pugnando, sed fugiens in ipsis porte angustiis, cum cecidisset, oppressus calcatusque obiit.* (*De Europa* 2082–2084) Contrary to other authors, Piccolomini does not try to glorify Constantine as a hero. He does quite the opposite: he degrades the last Byzantine emperor as it turns out from this short but poignant remark: *imperator non, ut regem decuit, pugnando, sed fugiens*. We can only guess why he does that. Maybe Piccolomini's bias against the stubborn and invincible Greeks are implied here, as it also happens elsewhere in the account.⁷⁸

It is due to Piccolomini's soberness and critical sense that he does not mention the rape at the altar of Hagia Sophia in his historical work. The reason of his moderation may be that he did not find any trace of the story in his main sources. On the other hand, he still had a number of episodes confirmed by sources he found trustworthy that he could blame on the sultan's bloodthirsty and cruel inhumanity.

It is time now to leave the path we have been following so far and start looking for clues in a different direction. As mentioned above, we can find various descriptions in the letters sent to clerical magistrates that Piccolomini also used in his subsequent historical accounts. The majority of these are typically not historical data but rather literary motives or historical tropes that represent the usual components of the anti-Turkish humanistic literature. These motives keep reoccurring in Piccolomini's works and Johannes Helmrath is right to note in his excellent paper that "[m]ustert man die Reden und Briefe sowie weitere Opera der Laien- (bis 1447), Bischofs- (1447–56) und Kardinalszeit (1456–58) sowie des Pontifikats (1458–64) nacheinander auf Türken- und Kreuzzugsmaterie durch, wird eine Kette inhaltlicher und sprachlicher Motive erkennbar, von denen

⁷⁶ Philippides, *Mehmed II*, 82.

⁷⁷ Cf. Helmrath, "Pius II. und die Türken," 102, 114.

⁷⁸ About this, see below.

manche variiert in fast obsessiver Weise wiederkehren."⁷⁹ This sequence is also traceable in the text examined here.

The sinful ignorance of the West constitutes a standard element of the account. In his letters, Piccolomini continues to emphasize that the Western states and their rulers are seriously accountable for the fall of Constantinople, since instead of joining forces and taking action against the Turks as their common enemies of Christianity, they were busy trying to defeat their own co-religionists. He complains to cardinal Nicolaus like this: *Imminet iam nostris cervicibus Turchorum gladius et nos interim intestina gerimus bella, fratres persequimur et hostes crucis in nos grassari sinimus.*⁸⁰ The letters sent to Pope Nicholas and Benvoglienti also include the lashing of the leaders of Christian states,⁸¹ and naturally, this theme also reoccurs in his historical work: *Senserant eius animum Greci diffidentesque suis viribus ad Latinorum opes confugerant lacrimis ac fletibus auxilia expetentes. Surde (pro pudor!) nostrorum principum aures fuere, ceci oculi, qui cadente Grecia ruituram christiane religionis reliquam partem non viderunt, quamvis privatis quemque aut odiis aut commoditatibus occupatum salutem publicam neglexisse magis crediderim.* (*De Europa* 2017–2022)

Although the humanistic anti-Turkish literature is in many aspects different from the crusade literature of the 12th Century, it continues its traditions.⁸² For instance, the demonization of the enemy is an important component of the anti-Islamic writings of both periods. As Hankins writes: "*Crusading literature was full of lurid tales of how Muslims had mocked and defiled Christian holy images, outraged Christian nuns, engaged in pederasty with Christian boys, turned churches into brothels and stables, dragged crucifixes through muddy streets, and so forth. [. . .] The fall of Constantinople, for example, brought forth descriptions of the sack of the city and Turkish atrocities that hardly differed from the twelfth-century accounts of Muslim atrocities in Jerusalem.*"⁸³ In his study, Hankins later makes a spirited remark that the authors like Isidore of Kiev and Piccolomini, who tried to force the West to intervene (start a new crusade) wrote long, passionate and blood-stirring accounts about the cruelties of the Turks like the camera of a 15th century news casting program (CNN).⁸⁴ In fact, as he himself stated in one of his letters, it was enough for Piccolomini to rely on his imagination (and his ingrained prejudices)⁸⁵ to depict the horrible acts of the Turkish conquerors with vivid colours. Here are some details from these letters:⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Helmroth, "Pius II. und die Türken," 87.

⁸⁰ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 58 (123–126).

⁸¹ Cf. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 48 (57–63), 60 (17)–62 (38).

⁸² See more details about this: Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 111ff.

⁸³ Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 119.

⁸⁴ Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 135.

⁸⁵ About this, see: Helmroth, "Pius II. und die Türken," 104–111.

⁸⁶ Examples 1 and 2 are from the latter to Pope Nicholas V, example 3 is from the letter to cardinal Nicolaus, while example 4 is taken from the letter to Benvoglienti.

1. . . *populum omnem gladio extinxit, sacerdotes diversis tormentorum generibus excarnificavit neque sexui neque aetati pepercit;*...⁸⁷

2. *Turchos autem in ecclesias Dei saevituros quis dubitet? Doleo templum illud toto terrarum orbe famosissimum Sophiae vel destrui vel pollui; doleo infinitas sanctorum basilicas opere mirando constructas vel ruinae vel spurcitiae Maumethi subiacere.*⁸⁸

3. *Sacerdotes et universi monachi diversis tormentorum generibus lacerati necatique sunt, reliquum omne vulgus gladio datum. Tanta sanguinis effusio facta, ut rivi cruoris per urbem currerent [. . .] Quid autem factura sit Turchorum rabies in urbe regia non scio, suspicari facile est: inimica gens nostrae religionis nil ibi sanctum, nil mundum relinquet; aut destruet nobilia templa aut certe profanabit. Heu templum illud Sophiae, toto orbe famosissimum, noningentis quondam sacerdotibus celebratum, mirabili opere, pretiosa materia constructum, vel ruinae iam patet vel Maumethi spurcitiae subiacet. Monachorum abdita, sanctorum sancta lupanaribus servient.*⁸⁹

4. *Insignis civitas, caput Orientis, Graeciae columen, imperii ac patriarchae magni sedes prostrata iacet, insignia Christi salvatoris deleta sunt, loca suo nomini dedicata spurcitiae patent, nomen eius sine fine blasfematur, reliquiae sanctorum ante ora canum procorumque iaciuntur nec excitari potest Christianorum somnus. Quid caedes in regia urbe factas referam, prostitutas virgines, ephebos muliebria passos, violatas sanctimoniales, omne monachorum feminarumque genus turpiter habitum?*⁹⁰

He writes about the Turks' wild destruction and their pagan deeds with similar passion and detail in his historical work too:

Tum subito capta urbe cesis omnibus, qui resistere ausi sunt, in rapinas est itum. Erat victorum infinitus numerus in libidinem ac sevitiam corruptior: non dignitas, non etas, non sexus quemquam protegebat; stupra cedibus, cedes stupris miscebantur. Senes exacta etate, feminas viles ad predam in ludibrium trahebant. Ubi adulta virgo aut quis forma conspicuus incidisset in manus rapientium, divulsus ipsos postremo direptores in mutuam perniciem agebat. Dum pecuniam vel gravia templorum dona sibi quisque traherent, maiore aliorum vi truncabatur. Cumque in exercitu maximo ac dissono, ex civibus, sociis atque externis conflato, diversae linguae, varii mores atque cupidines essent et aliud cuique fas, nihil illicitum toto triduo in Constantinopoli fuit. Templum Sophie, Iustiniani Caesaris opus toto orbe famosum, et cui comparari alterum nequeat, nudatum sacra suppellectile ad omnes spurcias patuit. Ossa martirum, que fuerant illa in urbe preciosissima, canibus obiecta et suis. Sanctorum imagines aut luto fedate aut ferro delete. Altaria diruta. In templis ipsis aut lupanaria meretricum facta aut equorum stabula.[. . . C]aptivi omnes in castra deducti. Pudet dicere christianorum dedecus. Dicam tamen et posterioritati tradere non verebor, quando persuasum mihi est futuros aliquando, et fortasse antequam moriar, qui tantam Salvatori nostro illatam ignominiam ulciscantur. Simulachrum Crucifixi, quem colimus et verum Deum esse fatemur, tubis ac tympanis preeuntibus raptum ex urbe

⁸⁷ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 44 (14–16).

⁸⁸ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 46 (26–30).

⁸⁹ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 52 (36–48).

⁹⁰ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 62 (37–46).

hostes ad tentoria deferunt, sputo lutoque fedant et ad nostre religionis irrisiōnem iterum cruci affigunt. (De Europa 2097–2114, 2118–2127)

Piccolomini moves through the classical⁹¹ steps meticulously like a chess player. His historical work vivifies the centuries-old tropes associated with Islamic conquerors that also play an important role in his letters: the slaughter regardless of gender and age,⁹² the mixture of bloodbath and fornication,⁹³ wild sexual desire, the rape of virgins and young men,⁹⁴ the plunder of temples and throwing devotional objects and relics before pigs and dogs,⁹⁵ the desecration of icons, the use of temples as brothels or stables,⁹⁶ and so on . . .

Humanist authors, however, had prejudices – obviously not completely lacking realistic elements⁹⁷ – not only towards the Turks but the subjugated Greeks too. According to many humanists, the lazy, insincere and greedy Greeks refusing Christian faith were responsible for the fall of Constantinople.⁹⁸ Even Piccolomini, who admired Greek culture and saw the reasons of the City's fall in a much more complex and subtle way, could not get rid of such prejudices, and these views sneak into both his orations⁹⁹ and his historical works as the following sentences demonstrate: *Coacti sunt servi verberibus ac tormentis dominorum abdita scrutari ac defossa eruere. Inveni non pauci thesauri, quos in ipso belli principio infelices suffoderant cives. Quibus si pro defensione urbis usi fuissent, suam fortasse vitam et patrie libertatem servassent. Sed avaro in aurum nulla potestas;... (De Europa 2114–2118)*

We can also find more subtle parallels than the above mentioned ones between Piccolomini's letters and historical work. One of such parallel loci can be read in his letter to cardinal Nicolaus: *Ipsūque (sc. Mahumetem) inter pugna-*

⁹¹ These motives also occur in the works of ancient authors. See: G. M. Paul, "'Urbs capta': Sketch of an Ancient Literary Motif," *Phoenix* 36 (1982) 144–155.

⁹² *Erat victorum infinitus numerus in libidinem ac sevitiam corruptior: non dignitas, non etas, non sexus quemquam protegebat; . . . Cf. . . .populum omnem gladio extinxit, sacerdotes diversis tormentorum generibus excarnificavit neque sexui neque aetati pepercit;...*

⁹³ *[S]upra cedibus, cedes stupris miscebantur.*

⁹⁴ *Ubi adulta virgo aut quis forma conspicuus incidisset in manus rapientium divulsus, ipsos postremo directores in mutuam perniciem agebat. Cf. Quid caedes in regia urbe factas referam, prostitutas virgines, ephebos muliebria passos, violatas sanctimoniales, omne monachorum feminarumque genus turpiter habitum?*

⁹⁵ *Ossa martirum, que fuerant illa in urbe preciosissima, canibus obiecta et suis. Cf. . . . reliquiae sanctorum ante ora canum procorumque iaciuntur . . .*

⁹⁶ *In templis ipsis aut lupanaria meretricum facta aut equorum stabula. Cf. Monachorum abdita, sanctorum sancta lupanaribus servient.*

⁹⁷ Naturally, the Turks did not have mercy on the city and its citizens. Still, some of the horrible acts were probably the invention of the Western authors' imagination. About the Turkish measures following the conquest of the city, see: H. Inalcik, "The Policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–24 (1969–1970) 229–249.

⁹⁸ Cf. Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 132.

⁹⁹ Cf. Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders," 143.

*tores profectum aliis minatum, aliis praemia pollicitum . . .*¹⁰⁰ The image of the general sometimes promising rewards, then threatening with punishment also appears in his historical work. Piccolomini describes that there was a critical moment during the decisive attack when the Turkish army besieging the walls lost its momentum.¹⁰¹ In the end, it was the sultan himself who helped his soldiers overcome the crisis: *Sed adest Maomethes fortissimum quemque nominatim vocitans, utque in prelium redeant, adhortatur: hos premiis allicit, illos minis deterret.* (*De Europa* 2063–2064) Although reversely, but the same scene appears in his historical work just like in the letter written years before.

Although Mehmed II occurs at certain points of the account as a war-lord leading his armies, he is not the protagonist. Piccolomini only devotes some lines to the conqueror sultan at the beginning and at the end of the work. These sentences directly or indirectly reflect the characteristics – although not always as sharply as elsewhere – that Piccolomini liked to cite in his orations too:¹⁰² the love of war,¹⁰³ seeking glory,¹⁰⁴ deceitfulness¹⁰⁵ and blood thirst.¹⁰⁶ However, the positive traits that are also recurring elements of Piccolomini's portrait of Mehmed do not appear: the reserved, almost monastic lifestyle not typical of Turks, avoiding feasts and women and the sultan's interest in classic authors and erudition.

To sum up, we can say that reading Piccolomini's text we have the feeling that different genres blend in his work. Some descriptive sections are composed with a sparseness and objectivity characteristic of historical accounts, then suddenly we find ourselves in the middle of an oration when the author changes the tone and the intensity. To find an explanation for this phenomenon, we need to cite Helmrath's study again that draws our attention

¹⁰⁰ Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli II*, 50 (29–31).

¹⁰¹ . . . *et iam Turci deficientibus animis languidius pugnant.* (*De Europa* 2062)

¹⁰² For more details about the portraits of Mehmed in Piccolomini's orations, see: Helmrath, "Pius II. und die Türken," 111–117.

¹⁰³ *Hic est ille Maomethes, qui Constantinopolitanis, ut supra innuimus, bellum intulit. De quo nunc referre, que accepimus, haud alienum fuerit. Volverat iam pridem animo Maomethes, quonam modo Constantinopolim sibi subigere posset, . . .* (*De Europa* 2000–2004)

¹⁰⁴ . . . *neque ad suam gloriam pertinere arbitrabatur urbem in medio Turcorum sitam esse, que suo imperio non pareret, tantoque maius inde nomini suo decus accedere, si eam urbem expugnaret, quanto progenitores sui, idem conati, turpius acceptis destitissent.* (*De Europa* 2004–2008)

¹⁰⁵ . . . *aliud dissimulans, incredibili celeritate extruxit ac munivit (sc. castellum). Bellum deinde urbi non modo indixit, sed contra inita federa, contra iusiurandum, intulit simul et gerere cepit.* (*De Europa* 2009–2011)

¹⁰⁶ *Post hec convivatus Maomethes, cum forte plus solito adbibisset, ut sanguinem mero adderet, principes optimatesque civitatis captos crudelis et sanguinarius carnifex fede misereque iugulari iussit.* (*De Europa* 2136–2138) Cf. OF: "Principes optimatesque captos crudelis et sanguinarius carnifex foede misereque iug<u>lari iussit. Philippides, Mehmed II, 82, 84.

to an important common feature of Piccolomini's writings: "So darf man seinen und seiner humanistischen Mitstreiter weitverbreiteten Reden, Bullen und Traktaten wenigstens intentional Öffentlichkeitscharakter zumessen und jene Kriterien verwenden, die Winfried Schulze treffend für die Türkendiskussion des 16. Jahrhunderts angelegt hat: Sie habe erstens eine ‚informative,‘ zweitens eine ‚diskursive‘ (gerade auf Reichstagen), drittens eine ‚propagandistische Funktion‘ gehabt."¹⁰⁷ This triplicity also penetrates this text. Piccolomini's historical account is rich in data, it is exponent, reasoning and elevating at the same time. The text shifts from strict historical descriptions to the areas of elocution depending on which task is emphasised. These borderlines in the text are rendered even sharper and more visible by the two directly opposed methods that Piccolomini uses to adapt his main sources in his work. It is worth noticing that, contrary to his approach in Leonard's letter, he devoted little time to Sekoundinos's text: making some small modifications, he imbedded the text of *OF* in his own work almost without change. The imbedded text coming from Sekoundinos only contained "dry" data: the sultan's measures, the structure of the Rumeli Hisar Castle, the launch of the attack, the enumeration of the catapults and various army devices and methods – that is: facts and data. So there was no need for an (elocutionary) intervention. Leonard's letter, however, offered completely different "data": the preparations in the camp before the final attack, the procession in the City, the desecration of Christian symbols, the cruelties of the conquerors, the sultan's blood thirst, Loukas Notaras's execution – to put it plainly: "data" of mobilising force. And the propaganda required an elocutionary intervention that Piccolomini did carry out since he was on familiar ground: the motives included in Leonard's letter had already assumed an important role in his letters prompting to take joint action against the Turks and his orations urging a crusade. So this meant no more to him than another routine task. Of course, the purpose remained the same: waking up the West. Contrary to Sekoundinos, who, in *OF*, fails to find words for the horrible things that happened in Constantinople,¹⁰⁸ Piccolomini does find the words that will hopefully inspire others to take up arms and pay back for the disgraceful crimes committed against the Saviour.¹⁰⁹ However, his hopes never turned into reality.

¹⁰⁷ Helmrath, "Pius II. und die Türken," 85.

¹⁰⁸ *Quis satis pro dignitate tantae urbis casum tantopere deflendam calamitatem, tot tantoque ab hoste rabido in sacra atque profana, in viros ac mulieres per immanitatem ac scelus passim patrata facinora vel memorare verbis, vel lacrimis prosequi, vel oratione complecti queat?* Philippides, Mehmed II, 84.

¹⁰⁹ *Pudet dicere christianorum dedecus. Dicam tamen et posteritati tradere non verebor, quando persuasum mihi est futuros aliquando, et fortasse antequam moriar, qui tantam Salvatori nostro illatam ignominiam ulciscantur.* (De Europa 2121–2124)